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I sent this to TAPOL

(Quick translation)

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"Opened" East Timor

On-the-spot Report 13 Years after Integration with Indonesia

International Recognition the Aim

Doesn't Feel Real to People

East Timor, exhibiting a mottled culture from thirteen years of precipitous Indonesianization following four centuries of Portuguese rule, seemed to be seeking its own identity. From Jan. 1 Indonesia's province of East Timor became, after thirteen years, an open territory the same as other provinces. This reporter (Sakada) entered the province at the end of last year after getting permission from the Indonesian Ministry of Information and others and saw the "opening day" on the spot. But there were no commemorative celebrations whatsoever. The governor was on a trip abroad, and one couldn't feel a mood of welcome on the part of the people, so it was quite a disappointment. This opening seems to be a measure directed to the outside world that the Suharto government, confident in its "effective rule" over the province, has taken to garner international recognition of the de facto integration. (Article and photos by Correspondent SAKADA Seiichiro, East Timor Province, Eastern Indonesia)

Thick colonial coloring

The capital Dili (population 70,000) three hours by air from Bali, is a small town facing the sea and surrounded on three sides by mountains. Most of the houses and buildings I saw on the way to the hotel as I rocked along in the Australian-make taxi were western style with round windows and arcades. The names of the streets were Portuguese.

There was a statue of Maria in the park, over 90 percent of the population being Catholic. Most of the people are of Melanesian or Indonesian stock, but there are many faces that you can tell at a glance are those of people with Portugues blood too.

I was invited to the home of Roberto Panaribuan (phonetic), 34, who works at the provincial tax office. He comes from Sumatra and his wife is of mixed Portuguese and Indonesian blood. His is a typical public servant's family with two primary school children. The food that was served was a mixture of East Timorese food, Portuguese food, and Indonesian food. The fish dish using olive oil was Portuguese.

Ever since the integration of East Timor by force, Portugal and Indonesia have not had diplomatic relations, but wine and other Portuguese food items are smuggled in via Singapore. The people can't change their food habits overnight.

Most people can understand, though to varying degrees, Indonesian, but not many elderly people can speak it. In this home too, the family speaks Portuguese and East Timorese Tetum, and the children went to the one Portuguese language mission school in the city. The weight of a history of Poruguese rule can be felt.

Still Unopened Areas

It was just after the new year had begun at midnight when the sound of explosions echoed through the town of Dili. The sound of explosions came one after another. Rumors of "a Fretilin attack" spread and at one point there were even some people fleeing. It turned out to be a fire at a military explosives warehouse, but for the citizens it was a scary "artillery salute" for the opening of the province. The Fretilin forces that , as a result of thirteen years of wiping up operations, are less than three hundred, according to government statements, hiding out in the mountainous Eastern area of the province. And I was told

that small numbers of them occassionaly clash with government troops. But I was told that of the thirteen districts, the five in the Eastern section were not opened for security reasons and I was taken by army helicopter.

The first place I visited, the village of Rai Soro Rai (phonetic) in Baucau district, had a population of some 4,000. It is in a mountainous area, and in 1975 when the civil war began the pro-independence Fretilin followers, who accounted for about one-half the village, fled to the mountains, while the pro-integrationists took refuge in a village some 10 kilometers away. Because the Fretilin forces surrendered in 1979, construction for resettlement began two years ago.

"And last year four Fretilin people surrendered," said Commander Jolio Puraga (phonetic), 41, of the village, himself a former Fretilin member. He said that in Lospalos in the Lautem district there is no fighting now, but there are quite a few "sympathizers" among the villagers. But a resident told me that there were clashes here in July and November and several people were killed, so it seems that there are still dangerous areas.

Fretilin, which has become a group of remnants in the mountains, no longer has the strength to achieve independence. If they nevertheless do not surrender, it is said to be because 1) they believe they will be killed if they surrender, 2) it is necessary to show their existence, by continuing to fight, to Fretilin supporters overseas.

Starting the Train before all the Passengers are on Board

Behind President Suharto's decision to open the province are domestic factors: economic stagnation caused by the long closure of the province, and a critical rate of unemployment.

There is also the consideration that international criticism of the annexation of East Timor has long fettered the country's diplomacy. As the leading power in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), it is taking the initiative toward a settlement of the over-ten-year-long

Cambodia issue, and it is concerned about settling (the East Timor issue) in order to actively pursue its Non-Aligned Movement diplomacy.

But it is said that the opening of the province met with resistance from the military. (Lieutenant Colonel) Bimo Purokoso (phonetic), vice commander of the security strategy headquarters, stated that "It will take a little more time before the details are worked out," and on the 4th, an Interior Ministry official announced that "the detailed regulations will be ready by the beginning of February," indirectly admitting that the opening had been a case of the train leaving before all the passengers were on board.

But leaving that aside, it is clear that, compared to pre-integration Portuguese times, the provision of basic community services is proceeding apace. Before integration there were only 20 kilometers of paved roads in Dili, now there are 800 km. A university was opened for the first time in 1986. Before integration there was only one high school in all of East Timor, but now there are six in Dili alone.

The governor, besides promoting investment from outside the province and creating jobs in order to raise the province's economic level, is drawing up plans for tourism to take advantage of the remains from the Portuguese period. But in fact, until the promising oil development gets going, high quality coffee is about all there is to offer, and the prospects are dim for large-scale investments.

I asked everyone I met, "What will change with the opening?" But the only answer I got was from a few people who could afford the expensive air fare who said, "I'm happy that the troublesome procedures for getting travel permission will not be necessary." Business is in the hands of Chinese Sulawesians, and the main posts in the provincial government are almost all monopolized by officials from outside the province.

For the majority of poor Timorese, things will not change for some time, and even though they knew the news (about the opening), the vast majority answered that they "didn't know" what it had to do with them.

Caption: Regular commercial bus service once a day between Dili and the Eastern region, which is said to have security problems, has been reopened since 1985.
Caption: The atmosphere from Portuguese colonial times lingers at this hotel in Dili.
(The text under the bus picture is a general background piece which I have not translated)